

Communication leadership fosters partnering

Story and photo by Cpl. G. Lane Miley

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti – Cooperation among service members here, outside relief agencies and the Djiboutian government brought new educational opportunities to four local schools in time for World Telecommunications Day May 17.

More than \$35,000 was spent providing the schools with 40 computers in all. The role of Combined Joint Task-Horn of Africa in the undertaking was simple – arrange a meeting with the U.S. Agency for International Development and Djibouti Telecom, the government's service provider and one of the camp's biggest contracts for outside telecommunications.

"He saw all these parts and brought them together. He asked to visit with them, but rotated out," said Air Force Col. Randy L. Blaisdell of his predecessor's vision to bring together U.S. AID and Djibouti Telecom.

Blaisdell, CJTF-HOA's communications director, said Air Force Col. David J. Gruber did his research and laid a solid foundation before redeploying from Djibouti. Blaisdell said Gruber really wanted to help further the local community's information capabilities, but did not have a direct way to help. Gruber sought out the Leland Initiative, U.S. AID's program for bringing the benefits of the information revolution to the people of Africa.

Blaisdell followed his predecessor's lead and introduced Lane Smith of the Leland Initiative, Steve Dorsey, the chief of party for the U.S. AID Education Program in Djibouti, and M. Pierre Durrey, the director general of Djibouti Telecom.

The relief agencies looked at some of the areas CJTF-HOA had been working in and from there the task force stepped aside and let fate take over.

"They were projects we'd been working with, so that worked out really well," said Blaisdell.

Dorsey met with Omar Chiek, the owner of Cyber Djibouti and purchased the computers.

Dorsey said following a "miraculous" 72-hour turnaround he and Chiek were able to deliver the equipment procured by Cyber Djibouti to the four schools. He said stickers imprinted with the U.S. AID seal were applied to the donated equipment. This would help the students remember who gave them the new learning tools, but what will have a more lasting impression is the agency's generosity.

"We distributed 15 workstations to Obock, 15 to Ali Sabieh, five to Dikhil and five to Tadjoura," said Dorsey. "Each received a network printer."

Along with providing the local schools with computers and a printer they also got new furniture. Dorsey said since Dikhil and Tadjoura already had equipped computer centers, the agency did not deliver furniture there. He said air conditioning was installed in Dikhil and arrangements for the same are being made in Ali Sabieh.

He said after the equipment was delivered and set up at the workstations teams of Djibouti Telecom technicians were in each school setting up the networks. The network providers set up unlimited internet connectivity for one full year.

Even in the most rural location the project was victorious, Dorsey said. He said he was invited to tour the schools and share a few remarks with the students and parents who gathered around.



The sign above advertises the World Telecommunications Day on a street in Djibouti City. Last month Djibouti Telecom set up networks at four schools and provided each with a full year of unlimited internet connectivity in celebration of World Telecommunications Day

he could."

Dorsey said the new combination library and computer center at the schools filled with bustling, eager students who first showed lots of excitement in the demonstration room and then even more in the hands on event which followed.

"In the afternoon, students competed in a quiz prepared by Telecom and the winner was a young man who was awarded a cell phone and [calling card from the communications provider]," said Dorsey. "I personally added to that prize the promise of a refill phone card once a month for the next year."

The chief of party said he plans to continue working with all the schools and hopes everyone involved continues to benefit from these and future donations. Dorsey said many needs in the schools will have to be addressed including training, maintenance and supplies.

He attributes the project's success to the partners at Djibouti Telecom and the schools.



photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew A. Butler

Comics do their duty for troops

"Comics on Duty" comedian, P.J. Walsh, performs his high-energy act for a captive audience of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa service members during a show hosted by Armed Forces Entertainment, May 28 at the cantina, aboard Camp Lemonier, Djibouti. Walsh, along with three other comics, brought laughter to the men and women of the Armed Forces who are fighting the Global War on Terrorism in the Horn of Africa from Camp Lemonier, located on the Gulf of Aden.